1: Gusinde, SH6 Yahgan SH6

622, 754, 755, 776, 787, 789, 791, 793, 874

[Information on various aspects of Yahgan culture which are closely related to the characteristics and activities of the yékamuš or medicine-man, including his training, role as a community leader, curer, sorcerer, and custodian of religious lore, have been marked for category 756 and will be found under that classification.]

/1310 com./

781 Finally there are a few superstitious ideas of a different nature. Nelly assured me: "If half-grown children run away from their parental hut, if someone wounds himself badly with his ax or if he falls or stumbles and hurts himself seriously, it means that some person in his vicinity is going to die. The persons who have hurt themselves are not to blame, nor are those children who have run away. Their kéipis prompts them, and they can do nothing about it. The parents of a small child will not explain this to him if he has run away; instead they await with terror the death that has been thus announced." Nelly gave me this explanation when I told her that one day, late in the afternoon, the small daughter of Mañemihem had run away with some other girls (p. 981). She pointed out to me that the wife of Thomas died that very night.

[113] SD:274 gives hunlí as a bad omen for the hunt, "a supposed evil influence arising from unclean and unwashed persons after sexual uncleanness eating animals, as guanaco or otter caught by dogs which caused them (the dogs) to cease to be successful in further hunting" /cited in English/. I did not come across this view; it does not agree with many ideas that have been definitely proved.

382 Young Darwin (f):II, 327 reports: "When York Minster was brought back to his own country the natives told him that he should pluck out the few short hairs on his face. They also threatened a young missionary who had been left among them for a time that they would strip him naked and pluck out the hairs on his face and body, although he was by no means very hirsute." Hyades (q):255 refers to this and asserts: "The Fuegians throw into the fire /1311/ hairs that have been plucked out or that have fallen out. They certainly do not destroy them as a hygienic precaution" /translated from French/. Actually, everyone is anxiously concerned about destroying every hair by fire with his own hands. Like the Selk'nam (Vol. I, 712), the Yamana do this purposely for fear a yékamuš might pick up a single hair and, by means of it, more easily cause a person some harm. Anyone who is certain that he has nothing to fear does not resist having a sample of his hair cut off; I succeeded in doing this.

[154]

/1385 cont./

K756 yekamauh" /cited in English/.

The yékamuf are not united in a group or society; rather, each one is independent and operates by himself. It is a general rule that each family group, that is, the combination of a few related families, has its own yékamuf. In this group, of course, he has a certain superiority. Such a distinction has no legal basis, but exists in fact. In this sense blood ties bind the yékamuf to his group for the time being. He profits by his greater age no less than by his rich experience and the many superior achievements which he has to his credit. His sphere of duty is extensive, and the family group with which he is connected expects all kinds of help from him. If he grants this willingly and successfully, his reputation steadily grows. Finally they all become so generally dependent upon him that he seems like a legally appointed person of authority (318), but it

> 318. Fitz-Roy (2):211 accurately judged this state of affairs: "I never could distinctly ascertain whether the oldest man, or the doctor of a tribe had the most influence; but from what little I could learn, it appeared to me that the elder of a family or tribe had a sort of executive authority, while the doctor gave advice, not only in domestic affairs, but with respect to most transactions" /cited in English/.

would be false to assume that the individual is to any extent hindered in his freedom of movement or in his independent way of life by the yékamuf. It is only occasionally that the medicine man acts in such a way that the tribal member who displeases him must give in or is forced in a direction contrary to his desires. In the main the yékamuf extends a great deal of help to his group and relatives in the exigencies and sorrows of everyday life. He, as well as those around him, sees this as the primary duty of his calling.

K756 The benevolent influence of the yékamuf is cheerfully admitted, but beyond that he is definitely a cause of great

/1385 cont./

disturbances. This is chiefly true of one who is accused of having caused the death of a beloved person or /1386/ a widespread sickness. For many people a *ndlamuf* may cause almost constant fear and anxiety. They cannot even flee for safety because the *ndlamuf* extend their influence over wide areas. The missionaries often complained about this. Burleigh, for example, wrote on October 23, 1890: "Death has removed from us one poor woman who gave us much trouble at Wellington with her sorceries, and by causing the death of those she hated, andwho went so far as to try her evil designs upon us because I reproved her and some others for their sins" /cited in English/ (SBH XVIII, 37,1890). The anxiety of a family group may continue for a considerable time if several *ndlamuf* fight each other in their own peculiar way.

In spite of all this, the people place their entire confidence in the *ndlamuf* at times of personal distress and general need. He must help them in case of serious illness, protect them against the threat of malevolent natural forces, lead an expedition of revenge, and defend each individual against all kinds of dngers which are part of everyday life. In general his activity is actually more beneficial and advantageous than harmful ad detrimental to the individual and his group. For this reason a capable, helpful *ndlamuf* is loved by his people, they appreciate and respect him, obey him and confide in him. If one *ndlamuf* is more capable than another, there is even serious jealousy among the individual family groups. In general each family follows its guiding *ndlamuf*, entrusts itself to his care, and defends him against others. From all this one can see how closely a *ndlamuf* is associated with his immediate neighborhood.

Although the natives themselves speak of women who act as *ndlamuf*, and many Europeans confirm this, such accounts must be qualified. Usually a woman does no more than accompany her husband in singing now and then, or silently and patiently sits beside him when he gives himself up to deepest concentration. I was often a witness to this. Old Emilie, who was married to middle-aged Ntenzeni, and Sara, the wife of Ndabenkomo, were pointed out to me as *ndlamuf* (N.B). Neither

318. Hyodee (pg.)27 also writes: "Mr. Bridges

/1391 cont./

X 756 Let it be stated with all firmness that every yẽkamuĭ is an altogether normal, mentally healthy human being. Persons who are mentally inferior and in an advanced state of senility are not taken seriously even in everyday life; how, therefore, could they attain that pre-eminence which every capable medicine man enjoys? Rather, it can be taken as a general rule that the yẽkamuĭ is talented above the average, that he is more active and more capable than the men around him. His greater ability and richer mental gifts alone place him above his neighbors; his extensive and more profound knowledge gained from experience give him standing. These natural advantages give a medicine man's activity considerable importance.

X 756 Naturally, there is a difference in their ability, depending
578 on the talent and knowledge of the individual. The people
/1392/ know and name those few yẽkamuĭ who have performed
• 767 impossible things, and they are satisfied with the majority who have not gone beyond mediocrity. In view of the disposition of our Yamana, it is not surprising that the greater ability of one yẽkamuĭ has caused petty jealousies on the part of another group whose yẽkamuĭ is not as highly regarded. The one who feels insulted challenges his rival to one of the customary feats of strength. Basically they take place as follows. A yẽkamuĭ throws an object, for example, a yẽkuĭ, at his adversary. In case the yẽkamuĭ who is attacked does not recognize the approaching foreign body or cannot nullify its effect, he is wounded, weakens, and dies. If from the start the attacker does not succeed in hurling the yẽkuĭ far enough, so that it falls before reaching its goal or is caught by the medicine man who is attacked, then the attacker is regarded as the weaker one and loses the competition. All this takes place in the mental field of vision of the medicine men, which remains inaccessible to the ordinary Yamana. The latter learn only as much as the competing yẽkamuĭ themselves tell them and only as much as they choose to reveal.

X 756 On March 19, 1923, the Yamana told me the following
173 ancient tale. Once upon a time there were two brothers who were capable yẽkamuĭ. For a long time they lived together peaceably, but one day they had a serious quarrel. All the

/1283 cont./

L756 T73 also lighted a signal fire and notified the group on the opposite shore that a ilúma would soon be sung here. From each of the two shores a canoe carrying messengers set out without delay to bring the news to the opposite shore. The two canoes met in the middle of the channel, and the people of one told the people of the other: "Our yékamuf has just died, his brother killed him!" Soon all the people knew what had happened and that those two yékamuf were equally capable.

X756 J54 The power of the medicine man also reaches out beyond the boundaries of his own home; it overpowers Europeans, as was shown in the case of Bridges (p. 1304), and the neighboring Selk'nam according to Clara who told the following story in March, 1923. Once several Yamana were camping near Puerto Harberton. Not far from them a number of Selk'nam had erected their hut. When they saw the Yamana there, they stepped out and began making fun of them. The Yamana felt insulted, but did not dare attack the others. Finally a yékamuf said: "I shall inflict harm upon them!" Without being observed he buried a yéuf against the last one of those Selk'nam who were retreating into the hut. The next morning when this man awoke he was blind in one eye. Later, when he started to walk a short distance, he fell over dead. That is how quickly the yéuf of that medicine man took effect. -- All the people present confirmed this incident and were convinced that it was the plain truth.

X756 [[2]] Sufficient proof that the yékamuf themselves believe in their ability has now been cited. They are convinced that their dreams and the things they undertake in the dream state have reality, that their influence on natural forces brings about the desired result. Whenever someone requests help from a friendly yékamuf, the latter usually begins working at it without delay. If he should not attain the desired goal immediately, he will repeat his efforts a second and a third time. The whole neighborhood gratefully acknowledges each success and the fulfillment of each wish, above all the person who obtained the greatest benefit. Thus it would be utterly unjust and false to call the medicine man a deceiver and swindler (326). After all, he has

326. Bove (g) 155 pronounces this unfair judgment without any qualifications. He

/1423 cont./

156 155 air. They believe that Wanapiñwa-nif sent the affliction (p. 910); therefore, the wrath of all of them is directed against him. After that they repeatedly strike at the fire with their hands with fingers outstretched, as though they were pushing the "sickness-evil" into the flames. After this agitated performance the yñkamuñ promise the people that they will soon be freed of their suffering.

156 At this point it should be recalled that the medicine man is sometimes a sort of leader. This is apparent in the kñma-yñkamuñ and in the kina (p. 1211). When a murder is to be avenged, he usually leads his people (p. 901), and two hostile groups attack one another under the direction of their yñkamuñ. In everyday life, too, everyone likes to get advice from the medicine man with whom he is friendly and acts accordingly, especially if any kind of danger threatens the entire group appeals to him. The following will show that the yñkamuñ feel obligated toward their groups. If a depressed mood, a psychic malady, or a general feeling of fear has seized the people, for example, during widespread illness, the yñkamuñ arrange the makñnkina, which is also the concluding ceremony of the Kina festival (p. 1209). This remedy dispels the particular spirits that have brought about melancholy and general despondency. If the yñkamuñ wish to calm the people after a day of excitement and prepare them for undisturbed slumber, they start the ñpur song. This is a real evening song, a soothing farewell to the waning day (pp. 797 . 84/).

/1424/ Y. Harmful Practices

157 159 If the yñkamuñ himself has quarreled with a person and wants to cause him grave harm, or if he intends to avenge a personal insult, or if he is carrying out the secret order of a friend who wishes to do away with an opponent, then he must first of all capture the kñgif of the person and lock it up in a little bag, no matter how far away this kñgif is. He needs a tiny bit of something that is closely connected or in close contact with that person, either a hair from his cloak of skin, a bit of wood from his hut, or a tendon from his bag. It may even be a

/1454 cont./

hair from his head, a bit of fingernail, or any insignificant thing. He takes it in his hands, stares fixedly at it for some time, kneads it and presses it, pulls it and shapes it, until it has taken on the shape of the person who is to be harmed. He can observe this transformation in his awake vision. Then he hides this little piece in an insignificant little bag called wéhur[1] (334). Now the kéyif

334. I cannot decide whether it is this that RD:275 designates as "humulaf, a skin bag in which yekamuf kept their odds and ends" /cited in English/. Hyades (4):307 gives this word as "bag of the healer" /translated from French/.

of that person is locked up as in a prison, and he cannot get out by himself. For his wéhur[1] the yékamuf prefers to use the conical cocoon, about three centimeters long, of the Thanatopsyche chilensis (Bombycidae), an insignificant-looking Fuegian butterfly whose caterpillar usually hangs its cocoon on Berberis bushes. From time to time the yékamuf takes the little piece out of his wéhur[1], squeezes it and kneads it, crushes it and presses it, pulls and yanks it, drops it on the ground and stamps on it with his feet, tosses it high into the air and catches it again convulsively in his hands, and worries it in every conceivable fashion with emphatic and limitless malevolence. Finally the person from whom this little article was taken feels somewhat weak and unwell. As time goes on his feeling of sickness increases more and more, for he lacks his kéyif which the yékamuf retains in his wéhur[1] and constantly torments. Since the body of the person must do without his kéyif for such a long time, he uses up his vitality and grows progressively weaker. If a stronger yékamuf does not see the situation in his dream and, aware of the threatened position of that person, order a halt, the person is doomed. If he is stronger than the other yékamuf, he must immediately free the person's kéyif from the wéhur[1] and lead it back to its body. As a rule the sufferer does not realize soon enough that a yékamuf has robbed him of his kéyif. It is only after much blood has flowed from his nose and mouth and he is very weak that a capable yékamuf will reveal the situation and offer to make the urgently necessary rescue. He does

/1424 cont./

this by freeing the person's kéŋpix from the power /1425/ of the malicious medicine man, catching it with his own hands, and restoring it to the suffering person. Usually this rescuer calls the other yékamuŋ to account for his base behavior.

Almost all yékamuŋ practice the above method of harming another person and torturing him to death. Each kéŋpix caught is put in a separate wékur[1]. When he is not being observed, a yékamuŋ will take out the little pieces representing the individual persons and their kéŋpix, one after another, mention each person by name, torture each one in a special way, and once again lock each one in his own wékur[1]. He frequently fills the bag with blubber, so that the kéŋpix will remain motionless, and sews it shut with tendons. He puts the separate wékur[1] safely away in a secret place. He continues his torture of each individual kéŋpix until the person in question collapses from weakness and dies. In the mental visions of the medicine man the kéŋpix has the same form and shape peculiar to the living human being to whom it belongs, but the yékamuŋ sees it only in diminutive size.

If a medicine man wants to create a lasting impression among his people, he will call them together and, after singing briefly, put himself into an awake visionary state. Then he shows the people a real wékur[1], takes from it an infinitesimally small object, and stares fixedly at a particular person. He says to the person: "Herewith I give you back your kéŋpix, it was in the power of X (335)!" The same thing is repeated with other

335. He specifically names a medicine man, usually one who he knows is hostile to himself or to the person addressed.

persons. They are surprised and believe that they remember having felt more or less exhausted. Now they are released from serious danger and loudly thank the yékamuŋ for their rescue. They have still more respect for him.

A capable medicine man sometimes succeeds in murdering another person within a few days. He either attacks a personal enemy or he acts on the special request of a fellow-tribesman. As he sings he puts himself into the dream state; his own kéŋpix

/1425 cont./

X757b 754 leaves his body and meets his Haučéllakīpa somewhere. The two now undertake a serious attack against the kĕspíx of the person they wish to destroy. They choke him, wrestle with him, and stamp on him. No matter how bravely the kĕspíx defends itself, Haucélla is stronger and finally hurls a yĕkuš at him so that he falls down dead. The poor man wakes up in a state of utter exhaustion; blood flows from his nose and mouth, and vomiting and other serious difficulties occur. He is so weak that his kĕspíx does not even remember having fought so hard the night before. /1426/ His physical strength wanes perceptibly and within a few days he is dead. I was told that if a Haucélla fatally injures a kĕspíx with the yĕkuš of her medicine man, there is no hope for the wounded person, but only a few yékamuš succeed in obtaining such capable co-operation from their Haucélla. No one explained to me whether and how the procedure just described can be reconciled with the unlimited right of Watauinĕiwa over human life and death. This much, however, is obvious, namely, that the yékamuš are the cause of constant uncertainty and disturbance for their fellow-tribesmen and that everyone must seriously fear and avoid a malicious, hostile yékamuš.

δ. Feats of Strength

X756 787 [555] There are all kinds of occasions when a yékamuš wants to prove his ability to his own family group or his superiority to his colleagues, for the more one of them achieves, the greater will be the people's faith in him and the more he will be esteemed by all. Younger men, especially, are obliged to demonstrate such feats of strength, for they must gain acceptance among their countrymen. It should be noted, however, that all achievements of this kind are performed by the yékamuš in their mental visions, and they clearly describe all the details. For example, one of them will be sitting in front of his hut fire, and during his singing he will become extraordinarily excited. Suddenly he cries: "Now I am seizing hot coals and filling my belly with them!" In the awake vision he stretches out his arms to the fire, as though he were tossing burning pieces into his mouth; after a time he makes